Stepping Up for Childhood: A Contextual Critical Methodology

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Abstract

In this paper, we theorize a critical methodology for education centering community experiences of systemic injustice, drawing upon Critical Race Theory, critical educational leadership studies, Chicana feminism, participant action research and political theory, to refocus our work on the human relationships at the center of the learning and teaching endeavor. We propose a discourse analysis of the dominant, master narrative and incorporation of a community of memory to provide emancipatory counternarratives that provide members with avenues toward territorialization and reclamation of communal spaces such as public schools. Finally, we present four potential sites of this critical methodology to be activated in response to North Carolina's educational crises, including NC Senate Bill 8 (Charter School law), the Read to Achieve law, the Teacher of the Year awards, and NC General Statute 95-98.

Keywords: injustice, critical methodology, Chicana, participant action research, rasquachismo, feminism, communities of practice, counternarrative, educational leadership, territorialization

$\mathbf{W}$e begin this article by examining the terms "critical" and "methodology." We center the term "critical" within the paradigm of Critical Race Theory and Critical Multicultural Education, wherein the word is tied to activity and transformation. We draw upon Delgado Bernal and frame "critical" specifically as a challenge to dominating discourses of educational practice that marginalize and suppress the voice of certain groups.[1] As children of two revolutionary moments (the Black Power movement in Detroit in the 1970s and the EZLN (or Zapatista) movement of the 1990s), we position ourselves as proponents of transformation, arguing that "critical" presents an exact and careful evaluation that promotes an inclusive turning point that might be fraught with danger for business-as-usual, status quo apologists. As Critical Race Theory and Critical Multicultural Education implement an active verb within the context of "critical," this epistemology maintains a direct connection with transformation and alteration of the dominant Master Narrative paradigm.

In a similar way, "methodology" is more than a listing of research tools and instruments, and incorporates the epistemological stance of the researchers. While surveys, narratives, obser-

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1. Delores Delgado Bernal, "Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research," *Harvard Educational Review* 68 (1998): 555-581.

vations, or analyses are important, "methodology" must include the often unmentioned positionality of the researchers and their approach to a specific subject of study. "Methodology" can be a listing of the techniques used to gather data, confusing "method" with epistemological "methodology." Taking direction from Delgado Bernal's case for raced-gendered epistemologies, we situate critical methodology within a contextual, living setting. Rather than spending time discussing differences between qualitative or quantitative methods, we argue that research itself must reflect the community of study and the scholar involved. We elevate the importance of particularities,[2] which can only be apprehended through listening, observing, participating, and evocation of community of memory.[3] In doing so, we push against the colonization of research by theories and methodologies that separate the researcher from the community, and focus on relationships.

This approach challenges the tradition established by the Frankfurt School, which privileged class as the unit of analysis with little attention to gender or race, and focused its methodology on critiquing the impact the means of production have on social arrangements, relationships, and cultural production. An interesting point in the genealogy traced by Thayer-Bacon is philosophical thought in ancient Greece that advanced the idea that critical thinking was needed in order to separate fact from opinion.[4] Discernment between the two was the objective, but the underlying claim of this dualist thought was that we can sever our epistemic subjectivity from the world out there.[5] Code sees refractions of this in Cartesian thought, noting the failure of Descartes to see the "epistemic significance of early experiences with other people."[6] This turn to community, anti-dualism, and a critique of the superstructure in the formation of epistemic subjectivity was made by the Combahee River Collective and Third World feminists, who imagined epistemology as theory in the flesh.[7] For these women, critical thinking and methodology could only emerge from deep knowledge of the body's interaction with the world. This lived experience was the site of epistemological production. While the Frankfurt School made distinct claims about critical thinking, it ignored discrete components that comprise subjectivity and the intersectionality of these; it ignored the flesh.

We both come from America's Rust Belt, raised in primarily low-income neighborhoods, and deeply embedded within marginalized communities. One of us is a White male who lived in a primarily African American city, while the other is a Mexican American female from a city of ethnic enclaves. Within those domains, we both were enmeshed in an orientation that regarded the dominant narrative as openly hostile to our perspectives and our respective people. Our theoretical lenses incorporate this disconnection and distrust of mainstream media and academic knowledge. The methodologies we have engaged in are similarly guided by the goal of disrupting status quo-supporting narratives and research, partnering with participant co-researchers, and human relationships, within emancipatory practices such as co-ownership, subject feedback and editorial authority, in a respectful and deeply contextual setting.

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2. George W. Noblit, *Particularities: Collected Essays on Ethnography and Education,* Vol. 44 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Incorporated), 1999.

3. Marta Sánchez and George W. Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism: Locating Leadership When Borders No Longer Hold" *Educational Leaders Without Borders: Rising To Global Challenges to Educate All Children*, edited eds. Papa Rosemary and English Fenwick, 57 (New York: Springer), 2015.

4. Barbara J. Thayer-Bacon, "Doubting and Believing: Contraries or Complementaries in Inquiry," *Information Analysis*, 1992

5. Thayer, *Doubting and Believing*, 375-376.

6. Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (New York: Routledge), 12, 1995.

7. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: SUNY Press), 1981.

Banks developed a typology of knowledge that may further the concept of critical methodology we are suggesting.[8] Banks argued that School Knowledge was comprised of both Popular Knowledge and Mainstream Academic Knowledge. Popular knowledge are the ideas and concepts that are consistently maintained within mass media production. Mainstream academic knowledge are the ideas that constitute a Euro-centric, dominating narrative of abstracted truths transmitted from generation to generation. Transformative academic knowledge, on the other hand, "consists of concepts, paradigms, themes, and explanations that challenge mainstream academic knowledge and expand the historical and literary canon."[9] We situate critical methodology firmly in the realm of transformative academic knowledge.

Critical methodology, accordingly, would need to incorporate the critical, transformative activity of closely examining a specific, contextualized subject within a practice that enhances relationships and uncovers counternarratives to dominant discourses through territorialization of discourse.[10] In a word, critical methodology would endeavor to uncover the human interactions between and among educators to create meaning and transformation in their lives and the lives of their pupils. Rather than relying on epistemologically "objective" measures, critical methodology blurs the relationship between researcher/teacher and research participants/students to focus attention on the humanity in both. Epistemological breakthroughs, truth-telling, and practical wisdom, exist in the moment between the participants, when members are engaged with each other; however, the final artifact, the academic paper, fails to reflect the dynamic and vital connections established because the fetishization of evidence and the positioning of "results" as markers of an assumed objectivity.

We situate our critical methodology within an analysis of one of the more disruptive movements in public education today: school reform. Our methodology speaks to a series of critical stances introduced above and drawn from studies in educational leadership and theory,[11] aesthetics,[12] and social movements.[13] We challenge the master narrative of school reform logic with the truth-telling and practical wisdom that inhere in the community of memory and reclaim the public space from marketizing forces.

The Methodology

We draw upon Foucault, suggesting that the language of power conceals available truths—discourse itself is "controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its power and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality."[14] It takes courage to go against these regulatory systems that

8. James Banks, "The Canon Debate, Knowledge Construction, and Multicultural Education," *Educational Researcher* 22, no. 5 (1993).

9. Banks, "The Canon Debate," 9.

10. Raul Zibechi, *Dispersing Power: Social Movements As Anti-State Forces* (Oakland, CA: AK Press), 2010

11. Banks, *The Canon Debate*; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans,* 9th Ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill), 2011; Sánchez and Noblit, *Nationalism Without Borders*.

12. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility. In Chicano Aesthetics: Rasquachismo." Exhibition Catalogue. Phoenix, Arizona: MARS, Movimiento Artístico del Río Salado, 1989: 5-8.

13. Raul Zibechi, *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements* (Oakland, CA: AK Press), 2012.

14. Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge: And Discourse on Language,* trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books), 1972, 216.

position one as mad when violating the conditions under which one can speak truths.[15] The dominating narrative asserts specific truths, truths that do not permit alternative understandings. Counternarratives, consequently, suggest that the dominant narrative's assertions are operating with their own internal rules and rely upon the illusory premise that only one option, the dominant one, is available. An alternative understanding of power is that there are many truths, many worlds, and, many centers, which are their own sites of power. They are in constant construction in ways that can disrupt what is perceived to be hegemonic State power and, therefore, taken as the "inevitable." To initiate such processes and have them gain traction has an impact on the relationship between a hegemonic center and anti- or non-hegemonic center and requires individuals and their communities to better understand how State power is buttressed by wealth, force, and narratives that occupy and shape the social perception so that other narratives seem aberrant and its storytellers deviant. That is, hegemonic State power deploys a master narrative to establish and affirm its power. We use the term intentionally—the master narrative is the story of the master that seeks to silence all other narratives and positions them as spurious and anomalous. The result is a body politic that places more trust in the master than each other.

This critical methodology draws its genealogy from the work of Chicana Feminism,[16] educational leadership studies, [17] political theory emerging from Latin American social movements,[18] and ongoing theorizations of rasquachismo (also spelled "rascuachismo"). Each process is a point of entry into our proposed apparatus (Figure 1 next page). The apparatus's discrete components are engaged in symbiotic and mutually constitutive movement. We posit that cultural intuition is distilled from community of memory[19] and community of memory is expanded when rasquachismo is engaged. [20] These improvisations become part of the community of memory and are redeployed as needed in a new form, mētis.[21]

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15. Foucault, *Archaeology*, 230.

16. Delores Delgado Bernal, "Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology," and Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press), 2001.

17. Marta Sánchez and George W. Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism: Locating Leadership When Borders No Longer Hold" *Educational Leaders Without Borders: Rising To Global Challenges to Educate All Children*, edited by Papa Rosemary. and English Fenwick, 57 (New York: Springer), 2015.

18. Zibechi, *Dispersing Power,* and Zibechi, *Territories in Resistance*

19. Sánchez and Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism," 57.

20. Rosario Carrillo, "Expressing Latina Sexuality with Vieja Argüentera Embodiments and Rasquache Language: How Women's Culture Enables Living Filosofia," *NWSA Journal* 21, no.3 (2009): 121-142.; David G. Garcia, "Remembering Chavez Ravine: Culture Clash and Critical Race Theater," *Chicano-Latino Law Review* 111 (2006): 1-16; Amalia Mesa-Bains, "'Domesticana': The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquache," *Aztlán* 24 (1999): 157-167; Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano sensibility. In Chicano aesthetics: Rasquachismo." Exhibition Catalogue. Phoenix, Arizona: MARS, Movimiento Artístico del Río Salado, 1989: 5-8.

21. Sánchez and Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism," 54.
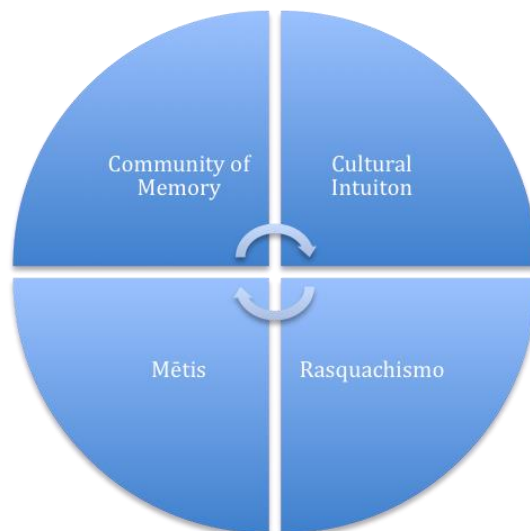
Figure 1. Apparatus for territorialization

We refer specifically to the collective community of memory,[22] knowledge emerging from lived experience from the recent and distant past; cultural intuition, a sensibility gained from personal and professional experience, the relevant literature, and the research process[23] rasquachismo, and a sensibility and a capacity for improvisation that is produced by need. [24] Rasquachismo is multi-dimensional, a concept referring to a Chicano-aesthetic art form and sensibility, which has migrated to performance and research methodologies.[25] Rasquachismo is an act, a state of being and doing in ways that produce much more than what we start with. It is also a disposition that allows us to improvise, using the resources at hand to create and maneuver. We include mētis,[26] "a range of practical skills and a learned intelligence from responding to constant change" that function as tools of resistance.[27] The processes overlap and interact in ways that, when brought into conversation with each other, function as an apparatus [28] that can be deployed to challenge the master narrative and overtake, or territorialize it.[29] Territorialization historically has referred to the power of being able to control geographic space, a right reserved by the State. Territorialization also refers to rootedness, sometimes in the local and sometimes in a broader social movement.[30] To challenge a master narrative is to challenge State power; territorialization requires human interaction, mobilization and occupation to defy and disrupt demarcations in order to create new ones.

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22. Sánchez and Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism": 57.
23. Delgado Bernal, "Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology," 563.
24. Carrillo, "Expressing Latina Sexuality;" David G. Garcia, "Remembering Chavez Ravine: Culture Clash and Critical Race Theater," *Chicano-Latino Law Review* 111 (2006): 1-16; Mesa-Bains, "'Domesticana;'" and Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo"
25. Ibid.
26. David Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 1998.
27. Sánchez and Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism," 57.
28. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press), 2001.
29. Zibechi, *Dispersing Power.*
30. Ibid.

A basic assumption in this work is that State power, or capital, is dispersed in ways that make it unrecognizable. We go further: capital will always have its way but is never reckless. It colonizes public spaces and coffers through intermediaries and remains undetected as an aggressor. In such a scenario, we can all be recruited and become complicit in projects that crush our own best interests. At the core of these writings is the need to be (1) rooted in community so as to have access to local and practical knowledge and inventiveness, and (2) possess a sense of urgency in responding to social injustice.[31] In the current moment of late capitalism in which public schooling has been marketized and school children repositioned as sites of profit, we must engage rasquachismo, using what we have and being "defiant…inventive"[32] and "noncompliant."[33] For this stance to be effective, we must belong to a "community of memory"[34] that helps us "feel our way through."[35] Community of memory is like cultural intuition.[36] Both rely on the "experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective and dynamic…[and that] extends one's personal experience to include the collective experience and community memory."[37]

The community of memory makes accessible to us *mētis*.[38] It is the practical, local knowledge that is "acquired only by long practice at similar but rarely identical tasks."[39] Sánchez and Noblit (2015) note that mētis is a process and strategy that educators can employ to counter or appropriate State power. It is difficult to teach mētis outside of actually engaging in the practice.[40] Mētis is akin to rasquachismo in that the latter is also "rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability."[41] The material reality of one's existence "engenders a rasquache attitude of survival and inventiveness," such that we are encouraged to make do with what we have.[42]

These strategies and processes, when engaged by educators, can move classrooms and communities into social action. Social movements are "bearers of other worlds."[43] Current social movements in education propose worlds that are different from the ones advanced by neoliberalism.[44] Activists and allies privilege social relations that build community rather than individual wealth. A key strategy in these movements is "territorialization of movement" in which spaces, or "territories of hope," are forged in response to oppression.[45] These spaces are characterized by collective action, reciprocity, and a desire to restore human dignity by responding to human needs. To further deflect State oppression, social movements disperse power in the same way that governments historically have done this, using other actors to carry out their agenda.[46] Aymaran resistance to the privatization of water in Cochabamba, Bolivia, for example, worked toward ensur-

31. Sánchez and Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism," 58.
32. Mesa Bains, *Domesticana,* 12.
33. Carrillo, "Expressing Latina Sexuality," 121.
34. Sánchez and Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism," 54.
35. Scott, *Seeing Like a State,* 327.
36. Delgado Bernal, "Using Chicana Feminist Epistemologies."
37. Ibid., 567-568.
38. Scott, *Seeing Like a State,* 7.
39. Ibid., 177.
40. Sánchez and Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism," 57.
41. Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo," 5.
42. Ibid.
43. Zibechi, *Territories in Resistance*, 13.
44. Zibechi, *Dispersing Power.*
45. Zibechi, *Territories of Hope*, 189.
46. Zibechi, *Dispersing Power*.

ing that any Aymara could reproduce the conditions for change. Zibechi (2010) writes that "community as a social machine does not merely exist but is made."[47] Knowledge is redistributed in such a way that the community becomes a site of non-State power. These theorists and processes begin to suggest a methodology with which educators can reimagine the instructional context as a site of non-state power in which other worlds are made possible.[48] This methodology can be used as an analytic to examine how power is structured in schools and communities and as a methodology to dismantle injustice.

The Particularities

The current state of affairs in education points to the need for such a methodology. The insinuation of a market-driven reform paradigm into the daily practice of teaching and learning in public schools is a global movement that positions public schools and individual school children as sites of profit and teachers and parents as adversaries.[49] This type of reform presses for the reconstitution of public education's historical role as a public good and tool for social mobility to being a commodity. Central nodes in carrying out the movement are the discourses of accountability and school choice and a man by the name of Sir Michael Barber.[50] Barber was a high ranking official in Tony Blair's administration who was recruited by educational publisher, Pearson, and named Chief Education Officer tasked with managing Pearson's growth plan. Hogan, Sellar and Lingard argue that Pearson is betting on Barber's extensive political network to reposition itself as "an organizational policy actor in education."[51] The case of Barber and Pearson demonstrates how policy can become hegemonic when government and private enterprise collude to overturn the public trust in teachers and education as a way to ensure corporate adjudication of public servants, spaces and goods. The North Carolina K-6 teacher licensing exam, for example, is comprised of two Pearson products, the Pearson Foundations of Reading Test and the Pearson General Curriculum Test for North Carolina.

The current school reform movement is an oppressive force that traffics in mistrust and alienation as part of a key strategy to take away from teachers, children, families and communities a primary set of relationships and processes that hold the promise for a better life. The constructs that comprise public school reform "talk," such as "accountability" and "school quality," in the quick read, suggests a new efficiency and rigor in education with the potential to be uplifting. A closer look, however, uncovers a master narrative that undermines or deepens an already entrenched legacy of distrust in public schooling among marginalized and poor communities.[52] In Chicago, public school stakeholders rightly asked, "Accountability to whom?" as they reflected on the school district's self-adjudicated supreme authority to decide on and implement reforms whose potential impact on student outcomes lacked evidence.[53] What is truly championed by these

47. Ibid., 14.
48. Kris Gutiérrez, "Pedagogies of Dissent and Transformation: A Dialogue About Post-Modernity." In *Rage and Hope: Interview With Peter Mclaren on War, Imperialism, and Critical Pedagogy,* ed. Peter McLaren, 169-191. New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2004.
49. Anna Hogan, Sam Sellar, and Bob Lingard, *Network restructuring of global edu-business. Mapping corporate education reform: Power and policy networks in the neoliberal state*. 2015.
50. Ibid., 43.
51. Ibid., 44.
52. Public Agenda. *Community Responses to School Reform in Chicago: Opportunities For Local Stakeholder Engagement.* Public Agenda: A report to the Joyce Foundation. New York, NY: Fall 2012. www.PublicAgenda.org.
53. Ibid., 13.

reformers is more of John Franklin Bobbit's early 20th century industrial efficiency-based model fashioned after the vision of American engineer, Frederick Taylor.[54] Bobbitt argued for a factory model of scientifically managed education that emphasized administrative control over the production process.[55] Today's new Taylorism is reflected in the standardization of the school curriculum that reduces teachers to production line laborers and in the testing schemes that punish children and teachers and publicly shame "failing" schools.[56] The word "reform" emerges as a free-floating signifier that suggests improvement while it conceals the dismantling of public education.

For many families, school reform has meant more of the same: the negation of an equitable education for their children. The models of school reform implemented in Chicago[57] and New Orleans,[58] and Michigan's Acts 192-197 that dissolved the Detroit Public School system altogether,[59] subsuming it into a new "community district" under state control, were made possible by the willful exclusion of the voices that parents, teachers, support staff and allies raised through protests. At the same time, the National Center for Teacher Quality (NCTQ), an organization created by the conservative Thomas B. Fordham Institute, teamed up with *U.S. News & World Report* to publish rankings of colleges of education that train teachers to work in public education.[60] These evaluations are based on a college's performance on 19 review standards, which NCTQ gleans from publicly available information, course syllabi, graduate and employer surveys, and student teacher placements.[61] NCTQ itself notes that their analysis is considered low inference, because their "analysts are trained to look only for evidence that teacher preparation programs have particular features related to admissions and content and professional preparation."[62] These rankings buttress business models that advance the idea that quality is improved through constant surveillance and competition. This converts communities of practice into institutional rivals for advancement and erodes ethics of care.[63] School choice similarly evokes the marketplace and positions education as an investment. It further suggests that choice should be made by attending to basic principles of capitalism rather than working for equitable funding and quality markers that reflect an ethos of commitment to meeting the particular needs of the community.

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54. Wayne Au. "Teaching Under the New Taylorism: High Stakes Testing and the Standardization of the 21st Century Curriculum." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 43, no. 1 (2011): 25-45.

55. Ibid., 27.

56. Ibid., 25.

57. Pauline Lipman. *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and The Right To The City*. New York: Routledge, 2011; Kenneth Saltman, "Closures and Chartering Aren't a Formula for School Reform." *Crain's Chicago Business*. August 26, 2013. www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20130826/OPINION/130829891/closures-and-chartering-arent-a-formula-for-school-reform and David Stovall,"Against the Politics of Desperation: Educational Justice, Critical Race Theory, and Chicago School Reform." *Critical Studies in Education* 54, no. 1 (2013): 33-43.

58. Kristen Buras. *Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space: Where the Market Meets Grassroots Resistance*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

59. Diane Bukowski. "Wall Street Greed = Death of Detroit Public Schools; Fight Back in Courts, On Streets" Voice of Detroit, July 7, 2016. http://voiceofdetroit.net/2016/07/07/wall-street-greed-death-of-detroit-public-schools-fight-back-in-court-on-streets/.

60. Diane Ravitch. *What is NCTQ?* Web log comment. June 17, 2014. http://dianeravitch.net/2014/06/17/what-is-nctq-2/.

61. NCTQ. General methodology for teacher prep review. 2014, 7. Retrieved from www.nctq.org/teacherPrep/review2014.

62. Ibid., 10

63. Konstantine Kyriacopoulos, "Civic Engagement and Youth: Research on." In *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*, ed. James A. Banks. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012.

The Case in North Carolina: Creating "Territories of Hope" by Territorializing the Master Narrative the "Charter School Law," the "Read to Achieve" Law, the Teacher of the Year Award and North Carolina General Statute 95-98

As we have indicated, the critical methodology we propose incorporates the communities affected by the research as co-participants. We offer these examples from the state of North Carolina as potential sites for this work; however, the co-participants, parents, guardians, and teachers in these cases have not been activated in the current phase of research. What we present below represents a potential, rather than the full-fledged critical methodology in actual practice. A comprehensive presentation could only occur when all communities of practice are engaged within the research and transformative practice revealed through participant action research. For the model to be thoroughly realized, community members would need to be able to meet and interrogate sites of difference and power through a democratizing practice of asserting the rights of silenced participants to have voice, and to critically deconstruct policies and languages that seek to dispossess administrators, teachers, parents, and students of agency.[64] Along with researchers, co-participants could then mobilize to reframe, territorialize and reclaim authority within educational institutions.

In North Carolina, where the state legislature has introduced laws that put into question the future of public education as a viable site of care and learning, we examine the inclusion of punitive test-and-damage assessments for third graders in Read to Achieve and the "Teacher of the Year" award in North Carolina Senate Bill 8, each indicative of methods used to apply business models of choice, meritocracy, and competition. We apply our critical method to navigate and analyze the components of these cases in order to reclaim and reconstitute community. We specifically employ the concept of territorialization.[65] Territorialization refers to the expanses of the Nation-State, the land and spaces it occupies. That is, this land and space comprise the national territory. Indigenous communities located in the rain forest and mountains of Latin America invoked the term as they began to experience the invasion of their homelands by multinational corporations. In an effort to protect these spaces, indigenous communities began to protest, adopting the phrase, "Don't invade our territories."[66] Zibechi (2012) introduces "territorialization" as the reclaiming of a space from an invading and invasive entity. In this process of reclamation, an "alternative efficacy" in movement emerges: community.[67] Territorialization is a reminder of the tools of sit-ins, marches, and boycotts North Carolinians have historically used to reclaim public institutions.[68]

North Carolina (NC) Senate Bill 8: The Charter School Law

The 2011, NC Senate Bill 8 allowed for the removal of the cap on the number of charter schools that could be established. This same law removed other safeguards intended to ensure quality in all North Carolina schools. Charter schools, for example, were required to have minimum enrollment numbers, were prohibited from creating schools that served only some students and not others, and were to be held accountable using the same student accountability model that

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64. Madeline Fox, Kavitha Mediratta, Jessica Ruglis, Brett Stoudt, Seema Shah and Michelle Fine, "Critical Youth Engagement: Participatory Action Research and Organizing," In *Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth*, eds. Lonnie. R. Sherrod, Judith Torney-Purta, and Constance Flanagan, 621-649, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

65. Zibechi, *Dispersing Power*; Zibechi, *Territories in Resistance*

66. Zibechi, *Territories in Resistance*, 136.

67. Ibid.

68. Bayard Rustin, *I Must Resist: Bayard Rustin's Life and Letters*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 2013.

public schools are subjected to.[69] NC Senate Bill 8 did away with all such safeguards. This unprecedented display of favoritism for the charter school system creates a perverse symbiosis with public schools: charter schools can exist and demonstrate good student outcomes because they can be selective and send "undesirable" students (in the eyes of the charter school system) back to the public school setting. At the same time, the public school's existence is now contingent upon this symbiosis: the public school *must* exist so that charter schools *can* exist as highly selective, segregated spaces in which the master narrative that upholds heteronormativity and White privilege inheres and is reified as curriculum and school choice. As support for public schooling dwindles, the only way public schools can exist is if charter schools exist.

Teachers and administrators working with children who live in economic poverty and who come from racial and other marginalized communities, can, together with the families of the students they serve, appropriate NC Bill 8 to create charter schools that serve their students in culturally sustaining ways.[70] They can introduce models of education that public schools in North Carolina have adopted in pockets of the state but not as statewide policy. These include dual-language programs, anti-racist curricula, Afro-centric curricula, and critical literacies curricula. By territorializing the space of charter schools as a legitimate space that can belong to the subaltern, marginalized communities pull back the school choice discourse in favor of curricula tailored to support the positive racial and social identity of their children and promote outcomes based on collective approaches to learning and teaching.

Read to Achieve (NC House Bill 950/S.L. 2012-142 Section 7A and House Bill 230)

Read to Achieve is a legislative initiative that is part of the Excellent Public Schools Act of North Carolina. The law impacts third graders enrolled in public schools and their teachers and parents. Third graders who are not reading at grade level are identified for extra services during the school year and are "encouraged" to attend a summer Read to Achieve camp, complete a student reading portfolio, or take either the Read to Achieve alternative assessment or the local alternative reading assessment.[71]

If students do well in the summer camp and score "proficient," they will either be retained and placed in a third grade accelerated class the academic year following the summer Read to Achieve camp, placed in a 3/4 transition class with a retained reading label, or placed in a fourth grade accelerated class with a retained reading label. Students with a "retained reading" label, regardless of grade-level placement, receive 90 minutes of focused instruction on reading. Some students qualify for an exemption for not reading at grade level; the exemption can be granted to students who are receiving English as a Second Language services, for example, or students who place "proficient" on an alternative exam.[72] Students who are proficient readers in third grade are promoted without restrictions to fourth grade.

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69. Public Schools First NC, *The Facts on Charter Schools*. North Carolina: Public Schools First NC, 2011. Retrieved from http://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/resources/fact-sheets/the-facts-on-charter-schools/.

70. Django Paris, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice." *Educational Researcher 41*, no. 3 (2012): 93-97.

71. NC Department of Public Instruction. *North Carolina Read to Achieve: A Guide to Implementing House Bill 950/S.L. 2012-142 Section 7A and House Bill 230*, 2015. Raleigh, NC, 2012. *Contracts Between Units of Government and Labor Unions, Trade Unions or Labor Organizations Concerning Public Employees Declared to Be Illegal*. NC General Statute 95-98.

72. *Read to Achieve Law*. House Bill 950, State Law 2012-142 Section 7A, 2015, 9.

While a majority of recently surveyed teachers support the goals of Read to Achieve, 92% of the 100 survey respondents reported that the law increased student stress and anxiety levels and had a negative impact on their development in academic areas because less time was spent on developing those domains of learning.[73] Critics of the law point out that the legislature's increased demand on third graders coincides with "...reduced prekindergarten opportunities, [elimination of] class size caps, and [cutting of] the ranks of teachers and teacher assistants."[74] Also noted are the lack of evidence in support of the Read to Achieve law and the excessive testing of children. As the law made its way into the daily life activities of the third grade classroom, teachers in school districts that adopted the use of portfolio assessments discovered that children would have to pass 36 separate assessments, each taking 30 minutes to administer.[75]

Thia "read or flunk" law [76] has a punitive effect on some children; retention in the early grades within the North Carolina public school system has been established as a raced and gendered process that is counterproductive and economically costly.[77] A law, then, such as Read to Achieve, that uses early grade retention as its primary strategy to create proficient readers, should be interrogated. The importance of children knowing how to read is not in question. What is in question is why legislators chose to enact a law that engages a practice (retention) that has been identified as disproportionately impacting African-, Latino-, and Native-American boys. Here, boys of color are removed from geographies of learning and resettled in holding spaces—intellectual prisons or reservations—and submitted to a series of reminders of their inadequacy as determined by spurious assessments.

Removal and resettlement were strategies used by the federal government to move Native Americans from their land as part of the colonial project and as a way to facilitate elites' use of these lands for their own profit and gain.[78] Today, young boys of color find themselves interned by this same logic. This manufactured failure of boys of color seeks the social erasure of these communities. Many actors can take part in territorializing the assessment discourse under accountability. First, academics can continue to call out the punitive, ideologically-motivated aspects of the Read to Achieve law and highlight its negative impact on all students. Second, the research and policy community can deploy a critique of the law and of lawmakers for the abuse of power demonstrated in passing the ill-designed law, which lacks evidence from the research and policy field. Third, teachers can evoke their cultural intuition[79] and community of memory,[80] and do what they have always done in quiet rebellion: close the classroom door and do what is right by children.

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73. Robert Smith, Scott Imig, and Brad Walker, "Read To Achieve: North Carolina 3rd Grade Teachers' Views on Reading Policies to End Social Promotion: Results of a Survey of 100 Third Grade Teachers in Southeastern North Carolina." Wilmington, NC, 2015. http://uncw.edu/newsletters/watson-chronicle/2015/09/wce-professors-survey-teachers-on-read-to-achieve.html.

74. Jana Robertson Siegel and Pamela Grundy. "Politics driven Read to Achieve: A path to failure for North Carolina." May 14, 2014, 8. http://dianeravitch.net/2014/05/07/north-carolina-the-negative-impact-of-read-to-achieve-for-third-graders/.

75. Lindsay Wagner, "Students, Teachers Grapple with Read To Achieve Law". NC Policy Watch. March 20, 2014.

76. Ann Doss Helms, "Read or Flunk Law: Changing NC Law Puzzles Parents." *Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), July 8, 2014.

77. Kindergarten Readiness Issues Group, Partners in Research Forum. "North Carolina Early Grade Retention in the Age of Accountability." Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, 2003.

78. Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

79. Delgado Bernal, "Using Chicana Feminist Epistemologies"

80. Sánchez and Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism"

Read to Achieve is sustained by the tautological argument, "Excellent readers go to excellent schools." The tautology conceals how the law allows schools to remove readers who are not proficient on reading assessments and how testing is used to continue stratifying American society. The tests themselves have been designed to ensure America's competitiveness through the "production of an efficient and marketable worker."[81] The law embraces the neoliberal logic that education must prepare students to compete rather than to take on the great challenges of our time. It aims to transform society into a place where no one really wins: the non-proficient readers are removed and the excellent students pay with their excellence to be able to labor and love within a narrow set of parameters that limit vision, human potential and joy.

Teacher of the Year Award

The North Carolina Teacher of the Year Award recognizes the work of a single teacher in the public school setting. The award includes the responsibility of providing professional development to colleagues throughout the state as a way to maximize her utility, to put it in neoliberal terms.[82] The teacher of the year receives an automobile to facilitate the travel she must undertake in order to fulfill this obligation. Schools feature poster-sized images of the car with the issuing car dealer's logo displayed across the image. A common photograph that circulates as part of the public relations campaign that follows the announcement of the award is that of the teacher shaking the car dealer's hand, both facing the camera with the shiny new vehicle at their side. Video footage might feature the teacher expressing gratitude for the car and what it represents: excellence in the teaching profession and the opportunity to share that expertise with others. A celebratory component is the actual award ceremony, where the teacher is introduced, presented to the audience and invited to offer comments, reflections, and expressions of appreciation. The moment reifies the master narrative of education reform. It fetishizes objective measures that are used to reassert the accountability paradigm. By identifying the one teacher that is the best one among North Carolina's 95,116, it dissolves the community of practice among education professionals, and it sows distrust between teachers and parents. [83]

Both of these events, receiving the car at the dealership and attending the award ceremony, are potentially emancipatory spaces that the teacher of the year can territorialize to reclaim community. The teacher can engage in a series of strategies to unsettle the underlying discourses that fuel a master narrative, such as competition, or the idea that only one person can occupy a particular niche, or "corner the market" on excellence. The teacher can invite her students and colleagues to these events as a way to demonstrate, through the physical occupation of her community, that the award belongs not only to her but to her students and colleagues as well, because it is through their shared work that she can be excellent. A second approach can be to donate the car to the

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81. Joanne Larson, "Operationalizing the Neoliberal Common Good," in *Closer Readings of the Common Core: Asking Big Questions about the English/Language Arts Standards*, edited by Patrick Shannon, ix-xv, (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann), 2013, iv.

82. Bryan Metcalfe, "Narrative Resistance to Democratic Education," in *Demythologizing Educational Reforms: Responses to The Political and Corporate Takeover Of Education*, edited by Arthur T. Costigan and Leslie Grey, 20-33, (New York: Routledge), 2015.

83. National Education Association. "Rankings and Estimates: Rankings of the States 2014 and Estimates of School Statistics 2015." Washington, DC: National Education Association, March 2015, 17. http://www.nea.org/home/rankings-and-estimates-2014-2015.htmlhttp://www.nea.org/home/rankings-and-estimates-2014-2015.html.

school for the use of the larger community, such as a school social worker who makes home visits or parent transportation to make it to school meetings. The teacher can also ask that the car be auctioned and the money be used to pay for a pressing school need, or to fund a school enrichment or tutoring program. The professional development that the teacher of the year is required to offer to fellow teachers statewide can be reconceptualized as a model of collaborative exchange in which the focus is on an examination of the school and community conditions and relationships that make possible the emergence of a teacher of the year. This model of collaboration should involve the entire school community from colleagues to students to families and administrators and should be offered online to facilitate the participation of the various community stakeholders. The teacher can territorialize the language of education reform and introduce the revised model of sharing knowledge as an "innovation" that leads to better outcomes for all. This move also implies that excellence is everywhere, decentralized and dispersed, and highly situated in its responsiveness to local needs.

The teacher can leverage the access to the public that the press junket that follows her to the awards ceremony and car dealership as opportunities to counter the master narrative that positions teachers as marketplace subjects rather than as members of communities in which every member contributes to the co-construction of a particular space and future based on a shared vision. Territorializing competitive dimensions of the Teacher of the Year award relies on enacting rasquachismo's ethos of "making do with what you have."[84] The teacher exploits the space she has for the greater good. Together with her community, she pushes back on neoliberal models of excellence which seek to confirm individual and collective progress using a normative standard as the privileged metric.[85]

NC General Statute 95-98 Declared To Be Illegal! The Right to Collective Bargaining

North Carolina state law GS 95-98 (1959) prohibits contracts between any government entity and labor or trade unions or labor organizations as these concern public employees. Collective bargaining is, therefore, declared to be illegal as part of Article 12 of the Department of Labor and Labor Regulations. This means that NC public school teachers who organize or seek to bargain collectively would be violating the law. Yet, with a 17.4% decline in NC teacher pay and one of the lowest amounts of per student expenditure in the country, as well as the loss of teacher tenure and salary raises for attaining an advanced degree, teachers may want to partner with students and their families to bargain directly with the state.[86] North Carolina has the 10th largest public school enrollment in the country, with nearly 1.5 million students.[87] The state also employs 95,116 teachers.[88] Together, with students' families, these numbers can swell to 2 million.

By territorializing the space normally occupied by a labor union, teachers, students and families become a formidable force that the state cannot ignore. It is not, however, just about the masses. This work must begin at the local level, with power dispersed within each school district

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84. Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo"
85. Metcalfe, "Narrative Resistance to Democratic Education."
86. NEA Research (2015, March). Rankings & Estimates, x.
87. Ibid., 11.
88. Ibid., 17.

horizontally[89] and rhizomatically.[90] Here, the community serves as a "social machine,"[91] where "subjective links [are formed] in which all participants are one"[92] and function to "reveal hidden aspects of cooperation."[93] This revelation energizes and mobilizes, and it is in this moment, as Zibechi reminds us, that internal power is unleashed *and* as it is unleashed, is discovered as power.

Concluding Space

In the four cases above, NC Senate Bill 8, Read to Achieve, Teacher of the Year, and NC General Statute 95-98, we present opportunities for critical methodology research. Each of these examples suggests moments of imminent threat to public education and the communities that rely upon the democratizing project of public schooling. NC Senate Bill 8 proposes the elimination of public school in favor of corporatized charter schools, Read to Achieve inserts the state control over the teacher-student relationship by asserting the damaging precedent that student development is dependent on an arbitrarily standardized reading level, and Teacher of the Year corrodes teacher community with the incorporation of competition between members of a community of practice, turning peers into rivals.[94] Teachers, parents, guardians, administrators, students and concerned citizens can reclaim the territory[95] of their community public schools by stepping up for childhood and asserting their local and practical knowledge and inventiveness,[96] becoming defiant to those who would usurp their authority,[97] noncompliant,[98] by reclaiming their ability to make do with what they have,[99] and participating in community-based action.[100]

As communities are reconstructed as an alternative efficacy, power becomes dispersed in ways that resist centralization.[101] This is not an easy task to accomplish, and in fact, results in a difficult coexistence with the state. Notes Zibechi, "the state is governed by the logic of the market: homogeneity and capitalism, while the community is governed by the logic of difference and its right to assert community."[102]

The critical methodology we propose for stepping up for childhood does not come without peril. The corporate and ideological forces at work to deprofessionalize and vilify public education in North Carolina, and around the nation, are well resourced and carefully orchestrated. Only an overt disruption and extensive critical analysis will engage those damaged by the privatization of public education and motivate communities to reclaim their stolen territories. Within a culture of compliance and conformity, North Carolina citizens face a particularly difficult task to address the

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89. Zibechi, *Dispersing Power*, 14.

90. Gillles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1987.

91. Zibechi, *Dispersing Power,* 14.

92. Ibid.

93. Zibechi, *Dispersing Power*, 11

94. Kyriacopoulos, "Civic Engagement and Youth"; Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 1991.

95. Zibechi, *Territories in Resistance*.

96. Sánchez and Noblit, "Education Without Nationalism."

97. Mesa Bains, *Domesticana*

98. Carrillo, "Expressing Latina Sexuality."

99. Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo.

100. Fox, et al., "Critical Youth Engagement: Participatory Action Research and Organizing."

101. Zibechi, *Dispersing Power,* 136.

102. Ibid.

power in the state legislature and act against edicts that dispossess teachers of the right to do their jobs.

Critical methodologies intervene as moral action taken up as a community. Their aim is not to produce a competitive worker but a just society. They activate and reclaim what we have inherited and continue to construct from ongoing struggles for human rights for all. These methodologies intervene as remembering- so that we might pick up the tools that were left for us. The researcher is no more capable than the co-participants; all can and have intervened.

We cannot predict where the co-participants and researchers will take the critical methodology with the four cases we have presented, nor should we. The idea behind this methodology is that it is deeply contextual, dependent on the circumstance and the practitioners, created for and by the situation that calls for it. The communities most impacted by these practices have yet to be engaged in this critical methodology but belong to communities of memory in which liberatory praxis is lived experience (e.g. Civil Rights Movement). Their conclusions will, nonetheless, be specific to their contexts. The purpose of a critical methodology is liberation rather than restrictions, or external impositions, emancipation rather than stratification. We suggest that engaged researchers step up for childhood through applying this method, but we will not—cannot—dictate the results or solutions they will arrive with. We can only assert that a critical methodology assembles community, and only community can transform and alter the dominant Master Narrative paradigm.

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